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Elite Discourse Coalitions and the Governance of 'Smart Spaces':Politics, Power and Privilege in India's Smart Cities Mission

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Elite Discourse Coalitions and the Making of 'Exclusive Spaces': Politics, Power and Privilege in India's Smart Cities Mission

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ABSTRACT

Smart Cities can manifest as exclusive spaces through strategies of privatisation and commercialisation. This article investigates why the smart cities discourse has come to dominate the Indian urban policy landscape. While 'smart cities' is a ubiquitous term, it has mediated through local political and discursive contexts in different ways. In India, where the Smart Cities Mission was launched in June 2015, the reason for the dominance of the smart cities narrative in urban policy-making lies in the formation of an elite discourse coalition. The elite discourses originate in very different spheres but together they provide a simplified and coherent narrative of India's urban transformation in order to establish a model of bypass urbanisation to avoid the 'local political risks' in the process of carving out exclusive urban spaces. By interrogating the dominance of the smart cities narrative as an elite discourse coalition the article contends with the received wisdom that it is just a natural outcome of neoliberal policy priorities and shows instead the precise and deliberate ways in which particular regimes of power and their biases and exclusions are justified and maintained.

INTRODUCTION

Why have Smart Cities emerged as the dominant discourse on urban development in India today? This article tackles this question by adopting a discourse coalition approach to explain

how a group of actors who originate in different spheres but share similar worldviews organise around a particular storyline on India's urban transformation. This storyline in turn sets the direction for specific practices and institutional arrangements. While the 'smart city' concept is popular globally (Jong et al., 2015), it has mediated and has been reworked through local governance networks and contingent local practices and broader policy discourses. In India, the term 'smart city' has been in use since the early 2000s and it coincides with efforts to liberalise India's urban development sector and the simultaneous emergence of powerful lobbies of information technology, management consulting firms and a new generation of professional middle classes.

Although the term 'smart city' is used rather widely and loosely in India with different actors trying to serve different ends, at its core it is associated with initiatives for building new, privately built and governed cities on the outskirts of existing large cities or dotted along transport networks like the Delhi-Mumbai industrial corridor. In fact, when Narendra Modi launched the Smart Cities Mission (SCM) in 2015 it was primarily envisaged to build new greenfield sites with less bureaucratic hassle and more private sector investment with the aid of enabling regulations like the Special Economic Zones policy. Those ambitions have toned down somewhat because of parliamentary opposition to amendments to ease land acquisition policies. However, it is important to note and uncover the ubiquity of the smart cities concept as a manifestation of the coming together of long-standing aspirations of elite actors to redraw urban landscapes as pockets of 'exclusive spaces' (residential townships, business improvement districts, special economic zones, export processing zones). These "exclusive spaces" are organised and planned in exclusionary ways in order to allow one kind of person- middle class resident, tourist or highly skilled professional (Low, 2016)- while deliberately reducing the number of undesirables.

No doubt, India's neoliberal transformation since the 1990s has given momentum to this emphasis on extracting "the profitability of space'. It allows for the privatisation of urban land by enabling the 'private interests' of the economically powerful to undercut the 'special interests' of the poor, dispossessed peasants and workers" (Smith and Low, 2006, p.2). However, to stop at explaining the SCM as just a continuation of neoliberal hegemony[i] would imply investigating a single point source- an elusive person or institution with a coherent set of ideas and practices (as if such a person/institution exists). It would result in glossing over the strategic actions, the conflicting interests and the manner in which different actors reproduce a given bias without necessarily sharing deep values or coordinating their actions in a specific socio-historical discursive and institutional context. Thus, if we look at the SCM as a coalition of elite discourses, which originate in different spheres but share similar worldviews and values, it can reveal important biases, norms, exclusionary logics that do not necessarily align with neoliberal ideals.

Political problems, as we know, are socially constructed. How an issue such as 'rapid urbanisation' is to be dealt with, is determined by how the urban problem in India is represented in the first place. A particular social construction of urbanisation, for example, does not, exist out there but is formulated from available socio-historical discourses and reproduces and structures relations of dominance. From a dominant discourse, therefore, we can see how powerful actors coalesce around a particular urban narrative and impose their view of reality by manipulation, mobilisation of bias and the exercise of power. Discourse coalition approach fulfils this purpose by starting with the assumption that politics is a process in which different actors from different backgrounds form specific coalitions around specific storylines. Therefore rather than look for an elusive person or institution with a coherent set of ideas and practices we look for the particular context of practices (policy programmes, embedded routines, mutually understood rules and norms) in which a discourse coalition is formed. By

looking at the origins of three specific discourses from three different actors we will get a better sense of the making of the smart city discourse coalition. The three discourses are: Narendra Modi government's *technocratic nationalism*, IT sector's *technological utopia* and MC activists' *world class city*. Each discourse originates in very different spheres but share discursive affinities, which coalesce into a discourse coalition in the specific policy context of creating smart cities.

Investigating these individual discourses and the process by which they come together to dominate a political realm will provide a more in-depth understanding of the indirect, ideational and institutional dimensions of power in the SCM. While an important enabling component of the SCM is the application of digital technology, it is also very much about reproducing a governance regime that keeps intact particular interests and specific relations of power and dominance. Urban development in India has emerged as an elite driven project. The discourse coalition of SCM therefore draws on the ideological synergies, values and worldviews of middle class, private sector and government lobbies to produce a simplified and coherent narrative on urbanisation. It attempts to keep intact a governance regime that can produce 'exclusive spaces' without the 'hassle' of local political contestation. In light of this, the following sections show how the *technocratic nationalism* of the Narendra Modi government provides the political argument for expert-led rule; how the *technological utopia* of the IT sector provides an economic argument for 'exclusive' smart cities for the highly skilled; and the *rule by aesthetics discourse* urban middle class activists provides an aesthetic rationality for delineating spaces for the affluent.

ELITE DISCOURSES COALITIONS AND EXCLUSIVE SPACES

In his seminal work *The Mind and Society* Vilfredo Pareto (1916) denoted ‘elites’ as those individuals who most excel in all walks of life and/or possess much power and wealth. Political elites consist of persons who are able, by virtue of strategic positions in powerful organisations and movements, to affect political outcomes, usually at the level of national states, regularly and substantially (Higley and Pakulski, 2012, p. 2). With neoliberal reforms it is widely held that the power has shifted to financial and corporate elites with global reach. However, corporate partnership with states as well as support of domestic social elites remain crucial to advancing urban policy interventions.

Theorists of the modern state have conceived of the coalition of elites as a small and narrow circle, of ‘ruling minorities’ consisting of major political parties and top executive positions (Weber, 1978) and the ‘top clique’ whose members share ideas, sentiments and policies and are therefore capable of agreed and continuing actions (Mosca, 1939). In democratic states, where there are institutional and regulatory checks on the exercise of power, the cohesion between elites cannot entirely be explained as a tightly knit group of a few hundreds, that circulates between important sectors (military, business, politics) to maintain their authority over the rest (Higley and Pakulski, 2012, p. 2). The influence of various elites over policy-making and political outcomes is made possible in democratic societies much more with persuasion than coercion (although the possibility of violence is implied and always there). In other words, cohesion of elites and their combined influence over policy-making is enabled through dominant discourses - which are simplified versions of elements of different elite discourses. Furthermore successful elite management of non elite conflicts “requires substantial elite insulation from non elite pressures” while also containing non elite conflicts “through bonds of loyalties, shared identities, common commitments and convergent interests between elites and non elites” (Higley and Pakulski, 2012, p. 8). The SCM as a dominant

discourse in urban policy in India today I argue is an instance of an elite discourse coalition that reveals shared ideas in the name of common good but equally seeks to insulate itself from local political contestation through special regulatory powers and institutional mechanisms.

For this article, by 'elite discourse' I am referring in particular to the text and talk of politicians, government officials, corporate managers, Information technology(IT) consultants, management consultants and urban middle class representations of resident welfare associations. Elite discourse is one of the important means that establishes, enacts, maintains, expresses and legitimates dominance (van Dijk 1993, p,17). One of the main sources of power of elites is their privileged access to various forms of public discourse through their control over channels of communication including mass media, research and scholarship, politics, business organisations among many other domains and organisations of society (van Dijk 1993, p.10). Therefore by looking carefully at the influential text and talk of elites from policy documents, everyday conversations such as interviews, speeches given by political leaders, research reports from IT corporations and consulting firms, televised debates and newspaper reports we can grasp how consent and legitimation for dominant interests is manufactured.

The SCM is a particular instance of the coming together and institutionalisation of three elite discourses- Narendra Modi's *technocratic nationalism*, the IT sector's *urban technological utopia* and the urban middle class activism for *aesthetic rationality of rule*. Each of these discourses circulates in different spheres from formal policy documents, to consulting reports, to manifestos and public interest litigations submitted by resident's welfare associations. These discourses share similar interests and visions for idealised urban environments that reflect the aspirations of affluent and aspiring classes for prosperous, clean and green lifestyles and for creating these environments with speed and minimum 'bureaucratic' hassle. These urban visions do carry exclusionary logics of development but these logics are concealed or euphemised by describing poverty for instance as a 'nuisance', as a problematic attitude of

dependency or just misplaced largesse on the part of social and political institutions. The extent of the 'exclusionary logic' varies depending on where the discourse originates. For example, IT consulting firms recommend that the urban economic model should prioritise 'highly skilled talented professionals' over 'mass labour', whilst middle class everyday conversations describe poverty as a nuisance, as unaesthetic and something to be kept outside their inner realms. Formal policy documents on smart cities, however, have started using a more 'inclusive' rhetoric due to political contestation over issues such as land acquisition and the rights of the urban poor (Hoelscher, 2016, p.13). While the term 'poor' appears in policy documents, the aspirations of the 'poor' are recognised as the same as that of middle classes.

In the SCM the differences and complexities between the three elite discourse get ironed out or concealed in one simplified storyline on India's urban revolution and the norm of conducting urban development initiatives without the 'political hassle'. The SCM gives more rigour to a long-standing approach of 'bypass urbanisation' practiced by urban elite, private companies and real estate developers, where in the absence of local political support projects bypass 'normal' political processes and still go ahead.

Therefore, 19 of first 20 cities selected for the SCM in 2016 will be delivered through Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) including: Bhubaneshwar in Orissa, Vadodara in Gujarat, Bhagalpur in Bihar, Jabalpur, Bhopal and Indore in Madhya Pradesh and Jaipur and Udaipur in Rajasthan. Andhra Pradesh's proposed new capital Amravati, which was not selected for Smart Cities' funding, will go ahead with support of foreign governments and international technology companies.

POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE SMART CITIES MISSION

One of the promises that Narendra Modi made in his 2014 election campaign was to create100-smart cities in India by 2022. True to his election manifesto, in June 2015 the SCM was launched with a budget of $15billion. The SCM was presented as something of an urban revolution aimed at addressing India's rapid urbanisation, which is set to increase from 31.2% in 2011 to 40% in 2031 (Rav et al., 2016). The SCM was greeted with much enthusiasm and publicity despite the fact that in 2015 India's urban population (33%), much like the size of its supposedly bulging middle class[ii] is not comparable with other emerging economies like China (56%) and Brazil (86%) (World Bank, 2015).

Narendra Modi's SCM continues from the legacy of neoliberal urban planning, which was given an impetus by the previous Congress Government. In 2005, the JNNURM (Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission) was launched in order to regenerate India's cities. JNNURM lays special emphasis on decentralising urban local bodies, making city-level institutions more financially bankable and investing in large urban infrastructure projects, especially transport. Although JNNURM (2005-2014) was criticised for funding delays and for failing to devolve power to urban local bodies (Weinstein et al., 2014) it succeeded in changing legal systems and processes in order to "remove the constraints from using land as a resource" (Jaipal Reddy, Minister of Urban Development, 2009). These reforms included the amendment to the Eviction of Unauthorised Occupants Act, 1971 in 2010 to enable eviction without delay from "public premises" like metro rail projects; and the call to repeal of the Urban Land Ceiling Act from all 29 states and Union Territories by 2010. Furthermore, institutional changes such as the bifurcation of the Ministry of Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation in 2005 to two separate ministries – Ministry of Urban Development and Ministry of Housing and Poverty reflected the shift towards more market led urban development.

In 2015, the SCM was launched as a competition, where the Urban Development Ministry first came up with a list of 100 cities. Subsequently, municipal offices submitted bids to procure central government funding of $75 million each to carry out selected urban redevelopment projects by 2022. Of the 97 cities most of them are located on major urban-industrial corridors (Pune, Kakinada, Kochi, Belgaum, Solapur, Hubbali-Dharwad), or have the potential of developing as satellite towns for major cities (Davanageree, Bidhannagar, Belagavi), 24 are capital cities (Guwahati, New Delhi, Chennai), 24 are business and industrial centres, 18 are culture and tourism influenced areas (Ujjain, Tirupati, Varanasi), 5 are port cities (Kochi, Surat, Vishakapatnam) and 3 are education and health care hubs. Furthermore, 71% of the funding for first 20 cities that were selected will be spent on area-based development (including redevelopment of old cities and creation of new central business districts, retrofitting infrastructure such as water supply, sewerage and creation of public spaces), which are expected to benefit only 4% of the city's population on average (Joshi, 2016). A further 40 cities and 38 cities were added within the next 2 years (2016-2018).

Operationally, the SCM departs from previous urban development programmes in two important respects: i) instead of developing neglected urban areas or enhancing urban services to match supply with growing demand the SCM takes an area-based approach to upgrading cities. This could include *greenfield* projects which are entirely new satellite townships to existing cities, *retrofitting* new infrastructure in an existing area or *re-developing* built-up areas; ii) in contradiction with the 74th constitutional amendment, which was aimed at devolving more power and autonomy to municipal governments, the SCM invests in Special Purpose Vehicles which can bypass urban local bodies to implement the mission.

Although the SPV is supposed to be just a more efficient implementing body than a government entity, its main purpose is to act as a revenue stream with decision-making powers taken away from the heads of municipal and state governments and given to the CEO of the SPV. It is

important to note here, that the Central Government's total allocations of $15billion over 5 years for 100 cities (of which $7.5 billion is for Smart Cities and $7.5 for AMRUT which is a low cost housing initiative) (Jaitley, 2014) is less than the total budget of the JNNURM which was $20billion for 67 cities for 7 years between March 2007-March 2014 (MUD Annual Report 2005,p1-2). In the SCM municipal managers and state government leaders have to find most of the funding for urban projects from private investors. The Smart Cities' SPV, which is set up as a limited company under Companies Act, 2013 would have the central government funding (from the SCM) kept in a separate grant fund, which in turn would have to be matched by the state government and urban local body through a range of revenue generating instruments including private investment, infrastructure debt funds, real estate investment trusts, municipal bonds, loans, joint ventures, taxes and surcharges (MOUD, 2015, p.14). The SPV would be a much more credit worthy and politically-risk free body to bring private investments to. Thus, one of the conditions of the SPV is that state government and urban local bodies should be equal equity shareholders who can invite private investors to have a stake in the equity.

The SPV therefore as a model of interactive governance is the precise set of practices where an elite discourse coalition is sealed together to institutionalise a particular model of urban development, which sees urban land and the uses to which it is put chiefly through a monetised lens. If the Central Government through institutionalising this discourse paves the way for a more centralised model of urban governance that encourages private partnership but dispels local devolution of power, then the IT sector through their focus on urban digital innovation see cities as knowledge economies of the highly skilled and "returns urban planning to standardised modernist traditions" (Joss, 2016, p.2). Meanwhile the urban upper middle classes, who have been the chief beneficiaries of the neoliberal economic model, can tune in their aesthetic desire for "slum free" and "poverty free" world-class public spaces with the

other two discourses. The smart cities discourse coalition therefore is not just an extension of neoliberal hegemony it is the coming together of elite discourses within the specific and favourable context of a policy programme, which is deliberately placed outside of local representative politics.

We will now look at each of the three discourses that make up the Smart Cities discourse coalition.

MODI'S TECHNOCRATIC NATIONALISM

Narendra Modi's national urban mission continues from already-existing market led urban development policies while also bringing his own legacy from Gujarat which under his leadership (2001-2014) emerged as India's most urbanised state (in the 2011 census Gujarat's urban population was 42.5% whereas the national average was 31.16%) (Government of Gujarat, 2011, p.5). Modi's philosophy of "rurbanisation" stressed urban development over rural investment, with emphasis on setting up "world-class" townships on rural land quickly and without bureaucratic hassle.

Modi's political discourse can be termed as "technocratic nationalism". It is "technocratic" because of the belief in technology-based solutions for social problems as well as the faith in the "rule of experts" (consultants, corporate managers, bureaucrats). This includes Modi himself who is presented as a CEO-like figure - more a manager who believes in outcomes rather than a politician. It is "nationalist" because of the discourse of pride and community that it is imbued with. Much of Narendra Modi's overwhelming popularity can be attributed to a successful strategy of combining nationalist discourse with neoliberal development imperatives. Nitasha Kaul (2017) argues for instance that the populist appeal of Modi led BJP

government in contemporary India lies in large part to a successful strategy of political myth-making wherein both Hindu nationalism and development - one seen as cultural and reactionary and the other as economic and apolitical can successfully work together. Smart cities for example aim at harnessing urban economic potential but also appeal to majoritarian desires for more control over public space through circulating tropes of global status, religiosity, heritage and affluent lifestyles.

Accordingly, Modi's urban mission is directed to what he calls as the "neo middle class", along with his usual upper middle class support base. He had first used the term in 2012 Gujarat Assembly election manifesto to refer to urban voters who had just moved out of poverty but were not yet firmly positioned in the luxuries of "middle class life". Modi's "neo-middle class" comprises of a range of low-skilled urban workers from tea vendors, to mechanics and cable T.V. operators. It's the lower end of the middle class that has seen the greatest expansion in the decade between 2001 and 2011 as the number of low income households (earning just over £2 per day) has increased from 63% in 2001 to 77% in 2011 (Kochchar, 2015). Whereas the middle income households (earning more than $10 a day) have marginally increased from 1% in 2001 to 11% in 2011 (Kochchar, 2015).

In policy documents like the Union Budget (Jaitley, 2014) and the SCM (MOUD, 2015) the term "middle class" appears more often than traditional policy subjects like "poor" and "common man". The use of the term "middle class" marks an important rhetorical shift as policies are directed to "established" and "aspirational" groups who show a fatigue with the political establishment's preoccupation with "the curse of poverty" (Jaitley, 2014), "aspire" for a house and more wealth, and rather than depending on state largesse want more speed and efficiency in building affluent "world-class" cities.

Narendra Modi, is a populist leader who relates directly to “aspirant” people and promises to circumvent all intermediaries and neutralizing institutions to realise their interests (Jaffrelot, 2013). Take for example the 2015 Annual Report from the Ministry of Urban Development. It opens with a statement by Narendra Modi himself that “AMRUT, SCM and Housing for All mark a watershed moment in our quest to create better and futuristic cities. These initiatives mark a paradigm shift, providing a people-centric approach to create world-class urban spaces.” In Modi’s political discourse “people-centric” means that people power is stronger and more important than institutions. He has for instance, described the SCM as a “people’s movement” and not just a system of allocating money for various projects. In a speech at a conference in Pune in June 2016 he states that, “It is not that earlier no work was done in our country, nor was it that governments did not spend budgets. Those of us who are in government…have to know that if there is anyone smarter than us then it is the citizen of this country” (Modi, 2016). More emphatically, he adds that, “if the strength of crores of citizens is consolidated then we will not need government and the country will progress rapidly on its own” (Modi., 2016)

In this high tech populism, Narendra Modi prevails over the urban policy initiative to the extent that in order to achieve outcomes quickly and efficiently he deals directly with professionals, bureaucrats and investors than the ministers of the relevant government departments (Jaffrelot, 2013). Take for example, Modi’s speech in June 2013, where he unequivocally promotes technocrats over politicians, “In urban activity the majority of the work is technical – roads, power – but manpower in cities is clerical – almost 95%. Clerks are bookkeeping but they cannot develop the city. So the manpower should give more strength to the technocrats.” Furthermore, the urban development ministers Venkaiah Naidu (2016) added that, “urban leaders must take the help of consultants, experts to formulate the smart city plan so that cities can be more attractive to investors and be outward-facing.”

This reliance on experts over elected representatives is consistent with middle class preference for technocratic rule, as shown in recent surveys. When asked whether "all major decisions about the country should be taken by experts rather than politicians, more middle classes have said "yes" than any other groups. From the World Values Survey of 2012 and 2014 it appears that between three forms of governance –democracy, army rule and rule by experts, the upper and lower middle classes prefer rule by experts and strong leaders to democracy (Basu and Capelos, 2016). The extent of support for expert rule and strong leaders on a scale of 1 to 10, in 2006 was 6.20 for upper middle classes and 6.17 lower middle class, and this grew in 2014 to 7.21 for upper middle class and 7.00 for lower middle class (Basu and Capelos, 2016). With Narendra Modi at the helm, middle classes are assured that he will valorise a more managerial decision-making process over parliamentary democracy.

This preference for technocratic rule is imbued with a nationalist discourse, which is not quite the hard-core anti-Muslim and religious chest-beating of the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) but is infused with sentiments of pride and ambition for India to be recognised as a global power and an economically prosperous nation. For instance, one of the principles that Modi emphasises on is the speed of execution of projects and thus he urges "the world thinks that India takes ages to complete projects. Can't we change this impression?" (Modi, 2013). On another occasion he says, "Why have so many countries in the world who got independence after us and who were more in debt than us have moved ahead of us?" (Modi, 2016). This preoccupation with India's global image would indeed have an appeal amongst the globally mobile middle classes and this sentiment of seeing quick changes is reflected in the setting of projects as short-term targets rather than long-term integrated development programmes. The SCM is set with a target date of 2022 – the 85th anniversary of India's independence, while the *Swachch Bharat* (clean India) campaign is set with a target date of 2027 – the 158th birth anniversary of Mohandas Gandhi.

Overall, technocratic nationalism fundamentally shifts the way in which the problem of poverty is defined. Poverty in this discourse, is not so much a problem of access or exclusion but rather the state's failure to recognise the material aspirations of the poor and to see how similar their aspirations are to that of the middle classes. Narendra Modi (2013) suggests that there are "two cities within a city - one is a city of those who serve and one is a city of those who receive services. He explains elsewhere "so far in Hindustan the government's attitude was that people will be happy as long as the government gives them something. But this is injustice to those self-reliant people. They are searching for an opportunity to do something to make a difference." The "opportunity" he is referring to is the city – "the city is a financial growth centre, and I believe that the strongest solution to poverty is the city" (Modi, 2016). He generalises that the "mindset" of all people is "that to move ahead you have to have a footstep in the city". Accordingly, urban development programmes are presented as one step towards fulfilling aspirations. For example in the context of the housing project he says, "any person, even the poorest of the poor has a dream of owning a home and once they have their own home he starts building more dreams…once the poor man gets a house slowly his aspirations also change. He will think that it would be good to buy a carpet. Then he will want to buy two chairs. Then he will want to buy a T.V. Then he thinks that to do all of this I will work harder, I will save money. And this is how self-motivation comes in" (Modi, 2016).

This approach of seeing poverty not as a problem but rather as aspirations for more material wealth connects with middle class values around consumerism and affluent lifestyle. And clearly when Narendra Modi talks about the "poor" in the context of Smart Cities he is referring not to the urban poor as such but to the new middle classes – i.e. those urban households who have just come out of poverty. This emphasis on aspiration and self-motivation is legitimised further through the emphasis on competition as the main driving force. He says, "previously competition was for who is more poor and backward, but this government is opening up

competition to move forward" (Modi, 2013). In other words, competition is not relying on state largesse but is about accepting competition as a fundamental ethos of market-driven society. He extends this principle of competition to municipal managers as well stating that "You become mayors through competition. To get a job you have to compete. Even for development of cities competition is necessary" (Modi, 2013). City managers are encouraged to identify a brand identity for their city – a unique selling point, which will be attractive to investors, tourists and young people (MOUD, 2015).

Thus, as we have seen above the smart cities campaign as envisioned by Narendra Modi's government is mobilised through a version of technocratic nationalism, which combines faith in the rule of experts and strong leadership to bring about faster and more decisive urban regeneration with the spirit of enhancing India's global image. But how does this connect with the discourse of the IT consulting firms sector and the middle classes? We will explore this in the forthcoming sections.

IT CONSULTING FIRMS' TECHNOLOGICAL UTOPIA

IT consulting firms (ITCF) frame smart cities as a technological utopia by bringing together two long standing tropes of urban planning: 1) systems thinking which conceives the city as a network of integrated systems where data, digital technology and people flow seamlessly; and 2) a utopian discourse that exposes urban pathologies and their cure (Soderstrom, Paasche and Klauser, 2014 p. 14). ICT facilities are presented as the key medium through which companies can collaborate and innovate to provide better services to citizens, improve infrastructure over less time and with limited resources, enhance economic efficiency and deliver on governance reform through more accountability and feedback mechanisms from citizens. ITCF present smart cities as a blueprint that can be applied widely across urban territories. However, it is

important to note that the application of the smart cities concept is "selectively adopted and reworked as it becomes embedded in local governance networks and pre-existing strategic concerns" (Cowley, Joss and Dayot, 2017, p.3). While the global discourse on smart cities has been described as a form of "corporate storytelling" where IT sector presents itself as an obligatory passage point for transformation cities into smart ones (Soderstrom, Paasche and Klauser, 2014), or as a return to standardised modernist and rational urban planning traditions (Joss, 2016), there are specific nuances to be found in the Indian context. For instance, discourse analysis of the reports of ITCF on Smart Cities in India and interviews and articles from leaders of these firms shows at least three interlocking discourse frames: 1) a *spatial* element of new urban territories as "greenfield" sites; 2) a *social* element of middle classes as the ideal citizens in whose name these projects are devised and rationalised 3) and finally a *political* component of private-public partnership.

Tracing the origins of the smart cities agenda in India, Hoelscher (2016) explains that it coincides with the economic liberalisation of urban development as evidenced in Mckinsey's influential *Urban Awakening* report (2010) which presses for market led approach to urban planning. The report suggests important changes to national urban policy priorities including: selecting urban development over rural development, taking the aspirations of the expanding middle class and tech-savvy youth more seriously and adopting a more techno managerial and corporate-led approach to governance.

The precursor to the Indian smart city were urban e governance initiative of urban local bodies (ULBs) in the early to mid 2000s. The terms "smart city" first appears in print media from around 2004 and refers primarily to public private partnership for massive infrastructure projects like the Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC) and residential townships of the urban elite (from my content analysis of print media reports from 2005-2015)[iii]. Through this period it is evident that while the concept of the smart city is coloured with terms such as

"gadgets and robots galore", "intelligent communication tools", "legacy systems" and "data analytics", the core issue is that of land acquisition and the "chaos" of delivering ambitious projects in India's political system.

India's Smart Cities follows on from the policy trajectory of Special Economic Zones– a controversial legislation, which was introduced in 2005 to enhance foreign investment by providing a single window clearance for land acquisition, exemptions from environmental compliance, labour laws etc. The 7 new cities planned on the Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor as well as Dholera and GIFT City in Gujarat were introduced through the SEZ Act and Special Investment Regions Act (SIR) as "globally connected financial and technological hubs of the new Indian elite" (Hoelscher, 2016, p, 33). When Narendra Modi initially announced that 100 Smart Cities would be creates by 2020 he had envisaged them as greenfield sites. Concurrently, with the Smart Cities policy he sought to remove requirement of landowners consent and social impact assessment on land acquired for developmental purposes as per the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (LARR) Act, 2013. He, however, has been unable to pass this ordinance through both houses of parliament in India, and subsequently more recent Smart Cities documents show a rhetorical shift that adds "inclusive" projects within exiting cities to the earlier vision of exclusive new cities.

The ITCF reports on smart cities in India are embedded within this policy trajectory, which prioritises smart cities as "exclusive spaces" for the new urban elite to be brought about through "enabling regulations" such as SEZ, Special Industrial Region (SIR) and the Special Township Policy, 2016. This framing of smart cities as "exclusive spaces" ties in with the aspirations of India's new urban middle classes for "world-class" gated cities that are modelled on the cities in the richest nations rather than their own local contexts (Fueller and Narasimhan, 2007). Thus, there are three interlocking discursive frames in the ITCF reports: *rationalisation of*

smart cities as greenfield sites, idealisation of urban upper middle class and *legitimisation of private-public urban governance model*.

Predominantly, ITCF reports conceive of smart cities as a blueprint model that can be easily replicated and connected. For instance, Cisco's Anil Menon (2017) urges "smart civic leaders to benchmark their cities against the very best cities globally" and presents Cisco Smart City in Bangalore as a model for other Indian cities to follow (Cisco, 2014). Amitabh Kant, Director of the Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor projects, adds that if cities do not benchmark against the very best they risk losing people as they will move away to the new centres (Kant, 2012). These 'state of the art residential zones' or 'greenfield townships', however cannot realistically be achieved fully in India's fast urbanising cities where development has taken place largely in breach of formal planning calculations. Although the informalisation of formal planning, has benefitted middle classes, rich property developers and businesses as much as it has selectively tolerated the informal settlements of the urban poor.

The preference for greenfield townships in ITCF reports, continues from the policy legacy of decongesting the inner core of India's large cities through acts such as Rent Control Act and Urban Land Ceiling and Regulation Act, 1976. However, contrary to the socialist principles on which these Acts were based ICTF conceive smart cities as exclusive spaces. A NASSCOM report (2015) suggests that "large parts of cities today completely escape mainstream planning and that illegal development (unauthorised constructions, slums)… threaten the future of urban areas…". Instead of the present planning focus on the core area of the city periurban and rural areas should be integrated into the regional framework the NASSCOM, 2015 report goes on to suggest.

These greenfield cities, however, are envisaged as business districts with all the residential and infrastructure facilities that would encourage highly skilled workers or urban middle

classes to migrate to. Anj Aradhya (2016), Director and Head of Enterprise Management Services writes “that while improving citizens services can be taken up for the existing cities, it (planning) should focus on building new cities as greenfield cities for real urbanisation”. New cities are exclusive cities and Laveesh Bhandari (2015) the chief economist at Indicus Analytics stated that price and police could be used to keep the undesirables out:

“When we build these smart cities we will be faced with a massive surge of people who will desire to enter these cities. We will be forced to keep them out. This is the natural way of things, for if we do not keep them out they will override our ability to maintain such infrastructure. There are only two ways of keeping people out of any space – prices and policing. … the prices will be automatically higher in such cities. Even with high prices, the conventional laws in India will not enable us to exclude millions of poor India… Hence the police will need to physically exclude people from such cities…”

The SCM policy thus sets out to build “compact areas” (not integrated areas) that can be a “replicable model” (not a locally led solution) for “other aspiring cities” (MUD Annual Report, 2015). New towns like Rohini, Dwarka, Narela in Delhi, Navi Mumbai to Mumbai, Salt Lake City to Kolkata, Yelahanka and Kengeri to Bangalore, Private Cities like Hiranandani and Lavasa in Mumbai and Smart Cities on the DMIC, Naya Raipur in Chhatisgarh and Sricity in Andhra Pradesh are preferred as one report suggests because “it is logical and quicker to build entire new cities from scratch “rather than rehabilitating infrastructure of existing cities” because of “the mess that Indian cities are in” (Agentschap, 2011). A Deloitte report (2015) suggests that while “developing a new or greenfield smart city with target population of 500,000 to 1 million is likely to require financial investment ranging between INR 75,000 and 150,000 (p.11) a large part of the investments may be recovered through sale of land and/or commercial and residential real estate”. Abhishek Lodha, Managing Director of Lodha Group which developed Pavlava a private city on the outskirts of Mumbai answers in an interview

with Mckinsey states that, “new satellite cities are preferred to improving existing ones as “old cities have limited potential to rewrite the rules. They cannot significantly change people’s living and working experience, whereas new cities can generate new economic activities.” Amitabh Kant (2012) stresses that “India needs to create 500 new cities by the time it become 75 in the year 2022, otherwise every single existing Indian city will become a living slum.”

These new developments are implemented through policies like the Special Township Policy (Government of Maharashtra, 2016), where the government mainly facilitates land purchase and access to public infrastructure like roads and airports. The rationale of state level and central governments for such exclusive spaces is that “knowledge based industries require high end commercial and residential built environment along with high quality infrastructure. Since these sectors are manned by the young, availability of good quality health services, educational institutions and modern entertainment facilities will drive such development” (Government of Maharashtra, 2016).

Knowledge economies have been promoted widely by ITCF and the Indian government has merged this within the SCM. Importantly, this emphasis on the knowledge economy” coincides with the priority given to urban middle classes i.e. the generation of professionals that have emerged since neoliberal changes of the 1990s as the ideal policy subject of the SCM. IBM for instance advocates the economic model of ‘cognitive cultural capitalism’ which is inspired by the richest countries in the world. This ‘new ‘knowledge economy’ is made up of sectors such as high technology industry, business and financial services, personal services and the media and involves digital technology combined with new forms of production, new labour skills and new social structures. A.J. Scott explains (2014) that a knowledge economy involves the top half of the labour force and IBM proposes that rather than “the bricks and mortar drivers of economic growth” smart civic leaders should concentrate on economy based on “brains and creativity” (Dirks, Gurdgiev and Keeling, 2010).

A Cisco report (2014) defines urban middle classes as "economic performers who are seeking to take advantage of technologies to further their personal and collective opportunities. The competitive advantage of a city's economy depends on its capacity to absorb the "talent pool" of highly skilled workers rather than on traditional drivers such as natural resources, physical labour or manufacturing prowess. Smart civic leaders, an IBM report advises, should "shift their investment strategies from attracting and supporting mass labour pools to creating system of services designed to optimise the city around highly skilled, innovative citizens and communities as well as knowledge-intensive businesses" (Dirks, Gurdgiev and Keeling, 2010, p.1).

A report from Deloitte (2015) defines changes brought about by knowledge economies as a disruption to labour markets caused by 'disruptive technology' – a technological innovation that creates new markets and value chains while displacing old ones. While the report recommends that automation would make some jobs redundant it also suggests that city's economic sustainability depends very much on its ability to attract highly skilled professionals in a competitive global market.

Thus, smart civic leaders are advised to prepare for a "war on talent" to ensure sustainable economic growth (Deloitte, 2015). Accordingly, the SCM suggests that civic leaders have to create the most attractive living condition to "lure the internationally mobile highly skilled labour force" (MOUD, 2014).

Finally, while digital technological innovation is a key enabling component of ITCF's discourse on smart cities, it also very much about governance reform. Particularly, in the Indian context this covers amongst other things the framework for public private partnership with more centralisation of authority, raising new revenue channels while also delivering more with less resources and conceiving a citizenship regime where access to digital technology is key

and where citizens are consumers who exercise accountability by providing feedback for urban services. Overall, the thrust of governance reform is to make private sector involvement in urban transformation projects less exposed to the complexities of representative government institutions and laws.

A World Economic Forum report written with Price Waterhouse Coopers (2016) sets the main principle of governance reform as: "create an environment where a balance is achieved between the private sector's goal to access maximum returns and the public sector's goal to achieve social welfare at minimum cost." In line with the SCM's model of delivering projects through SPVs the reports suggest installing "a unified command structure across multiple planning and administrative entities" (NASSCOM, 2015, p. 3-4), "ULB's making data-driven decisions", and a "single window system that ease the permitting process", "power and autonomy for the mayor".

In one report (NASSCOM, 2015) "local community opposition", "environment and other permits" are listed as risks, which can be mitigated with a more autonomous command structure like SPVs. Furthermore there is emphasis on expert rule, with statements like "cities in India are governed by generalists. A framework for urban specialists does not exist… which leads to "management by authority" rather than "management through knowledge". Citizen engagement is mainly conceived as inclusion by reducing the digital divide and encouraging participation and accountability through use digital devices. To sum up, while digital technology might appear as the key component for governance reform the principles in fact underscore more centralised authority and autonomy over decision-making, clearly maintains that social welfare remains the public sector's prerogative and finally conceives of citizens as digital consumers.

MIDDLE CLASSES' RULE BY AESTHETICS

We have seen so far in the discourse of Modi's technocratic nationalism and the technological utopia of ITCF's that the "construction of an idealised urban environment" in the form of smart cities is as much about creating an idealised middle class citizenry as it is about meeting the demands of an already existing middle class (Ghertner, 2012, p. 1161). Take for example the excerpt from a speech by the Finance Minister Arun Jaitley:

"As the fruits of development reach an increasingly large number of people…. A neo middle class is emerging which has the aspiration of better living standards…. This would mean that it will have to provide a very high quality of life comparable with any developed European city." (Jaitley quoted in Government of India, 2014, p.2)

Local states like Maharashtra, Karnataka, Gujarat, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh take an increasingly active role in remaking the city for the middle classes. The Gujarat State Government describes GIFT city, Gujarat – arguably India's first Smart City, as follows:

"We are not building this city for the ordinary Indian. We have to promote facilities which people are affiliated to. Since our competition is with Dubai, Singapore and so on we have to give them the comfort of doing business in the same environment." (quoted in Datta, 2015, p.83)

Middle classness is a social and ideological construction that incorporates notions of consumerism, aspirations for 'world-class city-zenship' (Kamath, 2007) and urban beautification campaigns for cleaner, greener and more open spaces. However, this ideological construct is at odds with the empirical reality of middle classes in India, which is highly differentiated, where largest expansion in the last two decades has taken place in the lower

middle class – earning just over $2 a day (Kochchar, 2015). So, if we look carefully at how "middle classness" produces an ideal urban citizenship it surfaces that it incorporates values of profit from real estate, use of digital technology as basis for equality of all, and an 'aesthetic rationality for exclusion of slums and other undesirables (mass labour, urban poor). Take for example this excerpt from an interview with the CEO of Pavlava private city, Mumbai, who emphasises real estate profit as an incentive for citizen's to maintain public spaces:

"Common spaces are not valued in India. This is because they are not well governed, or the legal framework makes it difficult for people to uphold their value. We see a difference in Pavlava, and this is probably explained by classical economy. Residents know that if their locality is well governed and looked after, the value of the property goes up. Two things can help to get people to value the commons. One is if they recognise a benefit or payoff, the other is the confidence that their efforts will not be sabotaged." (Mckinsey, 2017)

Urban activism, since the 1990s in particular, has been the chief vehicle through which middle class has emerged as a collective political identity in India. Middle class claims to the city have amounted to a discourse of the 'world-class city' (Brosius, 2010), which defines urban spaces as exclusive integrated townships that offer the very highest of living standards, with amenities and lifestyles comparable to affluent cities in the developed world. The "world-class city" discourse emerged in India's urban planning proposals from the late 1990s (Dupont, 2011) as part of efforts to turn megacities like Delhi into attractive centres for global capital investment. Around the same time, resident welfare association were provided with deliberating powers, through Delhi's *Bhagidari* scheme for example, to have more direct responsibility over the upkeep of parks and public places in order to prevent the encroachment of public land by slums. Since the 1990s there has been a surge of public interest litigations submitted by RWAS, which have led to judicial orders for slum clearance simply because they look 'unaesthetic' and 'illegal' (Ghertner, 2015, Datta, 2015). Mawdsley and Truelove, (2011) explain how earlier

slum clearance required rigorous, calculative practices by municipal authorities such as detailed enumeration and mapping whereas now all that the judiciary requires to issue a demolition order is evidence that a community looks unaesthetic – does not conform with the 'world'class' image that the city government and wealthier residents wish to promote.

Middle class urban activism has produced a peculiar citizenship regime where real estate ownership and more short loop accountability (bypassing electoral politics) and aesthetic based claims to public spaces are central components.

On real estate ownership as the basis for exclusive urban citizenship, Sanjay Kaul the head of People's Action a confederation of Resident's Welfare Associations in New Delhi suggests, "In Delhi those who legitimately own land, pay taxes and those with papers are getting pushed out of the city to satellite cities… the prices are going up so much from letting illegal occupation go on for political benefit (quoted in Ghertner, 2012, p.1175)." Thus he establishes real estate prices as basis for citizenship claims over public space and exclusion of informal settlements of the urban poor.

This manufacturing of citizenship through real estate ownership is linked furthermore to claims to direct or short loop accountability for RWAs. The Urban Federation of Residents Welfare Associations(U-FERWA) in Hyderabad for example suggests, "Political intermediation in the urban local bodies has not proved very effective and successful. Decentralised self-government without self-management has not yielded the expected results in terms of development and quality of life… The area of colony resident welfare associations and apartment building resident welfare associations are emerging precisely as the most suitable mechanisms for self-management" (U-FERWA, 2017). U-FERWA goes on to present middle class residents as the ideal citizens to carry this self-management initiative forward because: "they are educated,

qualified, experienced people who in general have some leisure, they are best people to self-manage and self-govern their areas" (UFERWA, 2017).

Not surprisingly therefore, the populist tone of Narendra Modi's *Swachch Bharat* (clean India) campaign and Smart Cities, where people power apparently overrides public institutions continues with the RWAs self management claims. The head of Vizag's Confederation of RWA in an interview establishes this synergy "RWAs are very much required so that people can support the government and the government can support the people."

This direct accountability between RWAS and central/state government, is in tune with middle class preference for bypass urbanisation, wherein as John Harris (2006) has shown - wealthier people in India tend to go directly to government or take legal action to solve their local problems and are less likely to go to political parties. These claims to bypassing urban local bodies for more direct action is based on the premise that middle classes are somehow politically alienated. In a television debate Sanjay Kaul the head of People's Action, a conglomerate of RWAs in New Delhi was on a panel with a municipal leader and a local politician. While discussing master plan for Delhi the T.V. anchor says "throughout this discussion one gentleman was quiet. Then looking at S.K. he asks "why were you quite?"

SK's response is emblematic of a typical position that middle class urban activists take, "when such a discussion takes place the normal man does not get much room to negotiate." The Television anchors asks, "why does the normal man always move back from such discussions?" And S.K. replies "unfortunately he does not think that politics has space for him".

To sum up, middle class activism around urban spaces is based on an aesthetic rationality of rule - where desires for cleaner, safer and greener environment have been the basis for pressing legal intervention on slums clearance. The combined effect of direct powers to RWAs provided by urban/state governments and the circulating discourses on middle classes from private

companies is a distinctive version of urban citizenship. This citizenship regime takes real estate ownership, use of digital technology as an equalising force and direct accountability of RWAs as its founding principles. It forms the basis of a governance regime that aligns with government and ITCF to produce exclusive spaces through more centralised and exceptional powers.

Conclusion

With globalisation and the changes in the international political system, cities are at the locus of transnational flows of capital, labour and trade. The multiple and interlocking centres of power and influence in 'global cities' have led to the received notion that the best form of urban governance is an 'interactive one' involving non-hierarchical assemblages of state and non-state actors rather than the traditional state-centred form of top-down and rule bound decision-making. While this notion accounts for the multiple centres of power, influence and diverging interests in cities, it also somewhat erroneously assumes that the decline of a single legitimate centre of sovereign power somehow makes the operation of authority/governance more diffused and inclusive. The sources of authority might indeed be plural but to be effective it has to be structured around a relatively coherent architecture of institutions (Hirst and Thompson, 1996, pp.184-185). New regimes of governance are the result of deliberate and careful political practices that aim to preserve one set of interests over others. In this article, we have seen the SCM as a form of governance that manifests in the form of the SPV. Handing over power from municipal government to a separate corporate entity like the SPV, echoes the ideological belief that states and cities (i.e. its people and resources) are helpless to counter the elusive market forces that have produced "partitioned cities" with new forms of division that exclude a large number of people from participation in the mainstream economy (Marcuse,

2002). How does this specific version of neoliberal urban governance make the production of such “exclusive spaces” possible? This article answers this question by adopting a discourse coalition approach.

The definition of the problem of cities as one of maximising it economic potential in tune with the prevailing policy settlement of economic liberalisation requires the existence of a “discourse coalition” (Hajer, 1993). This discourse coalition, as we saw, is made up a group of actors who in the context of the SCM utter the same storyline- on *what the nature of the urban problem is* (neglect of economic potential) and *how it should be treated* (bypassing local governance to transform cities as attractive centres for tourists, investors and highly skilled professionals). This discourse coalition has an institutional base – in this case the SCM policy programme- which operates within a particular structure of power that frames the way in which a problem is constructed and guarantees that the coalition will be listened to (Atkinson, Held and Jeffares, 2010).

However, in order to effectively position against competing forces the discourse coalition is forced to adopt language and narrative that partly contradicts their own values. For instance in the SCM there is inclusive rhetoric like ‘rurban’, ‘public use’, ‘citizen’s participation’, ‘holistic development’ from poverty and rights based approaches to urban development. However, in doing this the discourse coalition seeks to structure and limit debate, to prevent a problem from being though about in ways that question the narrative advocated by a particular discourse coalition. In the words of Atkinson, Held and Jeffares (2010) a discourse coalition therefore should not be thought of as ‘altrustic formations’ for a greater common good but actors that carefully and continuously develop and deploy strategies to achieve strategic goals.

We have looked at each discourse in this coalition individually in order to make complex this simplified storyline and expose its internal variation while also revealing how they are neatly

tied together within the architecture of urban interactive governance. If Narendra Modi's technocratic nationalism provides the political basis for centralised and expert-driven governance in the name of the new middle class, then the IT sector's technotopia provides the economic rationale for an elite knowledge economy for the highly skilled and the middle class aesthetic rationality provides the basis for excluding undesirables and for carrying out initiatives away from local politics.

The differences between the discourses are evident mainly in the extent of bias and prejudice they level. If policy documents adopt a more inclusive rhetoric – as if the poor and middle class share similar interests- then IT sector advices that too much focus on poverty is misplaced and should be left to governments to sort out, while the middle class discourses present poverty as 'unsightly' and therefore basis for slum clearance.

To conclude, the SCM will leave a legacy not just in expanding the role of digital technology in urban development project, but in institutionalising ideas that originate in elite discourses. These ideas have influence over how political and social institutions should be structured, how problems of exclusion and displacement should be addressed and how developmental priorities decide the uses to which public resources (land, money) should be put. Therefore, by critically examining the elite discourses that make up the discourse coalition on Smart Cities I have shown the biases and silences that are masked in the technical language of policy.

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[i] Neoliberalism refers to the revival of liberal ideology since the 1980s. In particular, neoliberalism emphasises economic liberalism, which is the belief that states ought to abstain from intervening in the economy, and leave as much as possible up to individuals participating in free and self-regulating markets. Neoliberalism has had a profound impact on urban restructuring projects in India, including in the reorganisation of municipal bureaucracy to allow for involvement of the private sector, changes in the financing of urban services, the reorganisation of urban neighbourhoods, and the primacy given to carving out specially demarcated zones for foreign investment and private enterprise (Brenner and Thodore, 2002, p.1).

[ii]India provides a less sanguine picture of its highly publicised "middle class bulge" than other emerging powers (Kochchar, 2015. P.43). When the poverty rate reduced from 35% in 2001 to 205 in 2011, it was primarily the share of low-income families which increased from 63% in 2001 to 77% in 2011) while the middle-income population earning more than $10 per day barely budged (from 1% in 2001 to 11% in 2011).

[iii] I have conducted content analysis of article containing the term Smart Cities in India's leading newspapers Times of India from 2005-2015.